

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, January 22, 1879, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Tremont House, Boston, January 22nd, 1879. My dear May:

At last comes rest after a long weary day of suffering — and I can write a few lines to you.

You will be sorry to hear that I have today had to undergo another operation. The last operation I underwent at the Massachusetts General Hospital was bad enough but it was nothing to what I had to bear today. Surgeons and Butchers seem to have no hearts. This time the agony was long drawn out. Instead of the operation lasting only a few moments — they have been at me all day! A regular dissection without ether — from the effects of which I expect never fully to recover. You poor little girl! It is too bad to torment you so! I better confess at once that my suffering today was mental and not physical. The doctors have not been near me. The fact of the matter is that Messrs. Chauncey Smith and Company have been hard at work all day dissecting my patents for the purpose of deciding what valid claims there may be on which to base an argument tomorrow against the American Speaking Telephone Company.

Oh! My beautiful patent of 1876! My specification of which I was so proud! They have hacked it to pieces — They have torn it limb from limb — They have plucked out the heart of the invention and have thrown it away — They have cast aside as useless all that I thought most valuable. They have subjected my invention to hydraulic pressure from legal minds and have squeezed out — into the gutter — the very life — blood of the idea. All that remains of my poor specification is — a little dry dust — which they blow in my face as the essence of the speaking Telephone!

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It is in vain that I protest. “An inventor is the worst judge of his own case” — “A man should never prune his own fruit-trees” and similar sayings — are rammed down my throat — ad nauseam — until I am choked into submission.

I suppose — since all agree — they must be right — so I let them have their own way — but I writhe under their decisions. “The undulatory current must be abandoned” — “The claims for methods of producing undulatory currents will not stand criticism.” Oh! dear! — all gone! all gone!

The instruments depicted in the specification — and the fifth claim of the patent — the only things to stand on. Well if they gain their point — that is the main thing. If they can obtain our injunction against the American Speaking Telephone Company I can forgive them everything. It is the fruit we want — however severe may be the process of pruning.

It may be all very well for the Bell Telephone Company and it may be fine fun for the lawyers — but in cutting up my specification they have cut me up also — as I stated in the commencement of this letter — as the result is that I am so tired and headachey and stupid that I must stop right here.

Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, 1509 R. I. Ave., Washington, D. C.